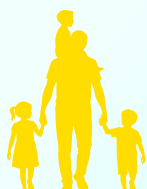




UNIVERSITY OF
KWAZULU-NATAL[™]
INYUVESI
YAKWAZULU-NATALI



MEN

AND MASCULINITIES

IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

EDUCATION

Hosted by the South African Research Chair
(SARChI) in Gender and Childhood Sexuality,
University of KwaZulu Natal



**TUESDAY, 30
JUNE 2026**



**08H00 – 16H45
(SAST)**



**THE SOUTHERN SUN ELANGENI & MAHARANI
HOTEL ELANGENI TOWER, SUITES 1-2**



ABOUT THE CONFERENCE:

Across global contexts, early childhood education remains profoundly gendered. The absence of men in this domain of work is striking. Men's absence is often reduced to questions of individual preference or their disposition towards children and care. Such explanations however are analytically limited. They obscure the deeper structural, cultural and historical conditions that organise early childhood education as a feminised space and regulate who can legitimately inhabit it. When men do enter this space, they encounter a field structured by suspicion, surveillance and the policing of gendered and sexual norms. Their presence provokes questions about how masculinity is both privileged and constrained. In this conference we are interested in how masculinity is constituted, regulated and contested within early childhood education. How are men to be understood in early childhood education? Under what conditions is masculinity made, contested and reconfigured in early childhood settings?

This conference brings together scholars, practitioners and policymakers to engage with these questions in relation to the South African context and beyond. By situating men in early childhood education within broader debates on masculinities, gender and childhood, this conference seeks to advance more critical and theoretically grounded conversations about the future of the field. This conference is grounded in critical, feminist and decolonial traditions that refuse simplistic explanations of gender difference. Instead, the conference opens up the space to contribute to understanding masculinity as relational, contingent and entangled with gender, sexuality, race, class and historical formations. At a time when anti-gender and anti-feminist movements are gaining traction including through the manosphere, the conference confronts the ongoing inequalities that render early childhood education as a no-go area for men.

INSPIRING GREATNESS

Hosted by the South African Research Chair (SARChI) in Gender and Childhood Sexuality, University of KwaZulu Natal

KEYNOTE SPEAKERS



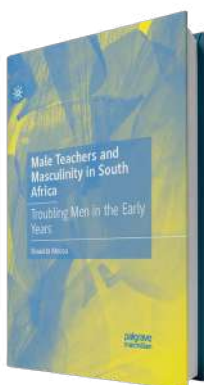
DR KEVIN F. MCGRATH **Australian Catholic University**

Dr Kevin McGrath is a lecturer in education at Australian Catholic University in Sydney, Australia. His research examines student–teacher relationships and gender diversity in the teaching profession, with a focus on workforce composition. His work on male participation in teaching has informed policy discussions in Australia and internationally and has been cited by UNESCO and the OECD. Dr McGrath’s background spans primary teaching, public policy, and healthcare. He has served as a Senior Adviser on workplace gender equality for the Australian Federal Government and has led evaluations of programs supporting students affected by complex trauma. His research supports more inclusive and relational education systems. Dr McGrath’s 2019 paper *The Plight of the Male Teacher* introduced a widely used framework for understanding gender diversity in the teaching profession. His research has been cited more than 1,000 times and has informed 33 policy documents, produced by 16 policy bodies, across 11 countries, including reports by UNESCO, the OECD, the Australian Government, and the Government of Chile. His research was featured by ABC News Australia in 2025, reaching an audience of approximately 17.7 million people.



MR KWANDA NDODA **DG Murray Trust**

Mr Kwanda Ndoda is a development practitioner and systems thinker dedicated to the intersection of early childhood development (ECD), social innovation, and masculinity. Currently leading infrastructure and policy initiatives at the DG Murray Trust, Mr Ndoda bridges government and philanthropy to strengthen systems for children and caregivers. A key contributor to the *State of South Africa’s Fathers* reports and a pioneer in documenting male ECD practitioners, he advocates for “responsive caregiving” as the next development frontier. Mr Ndoda’s work explores how positive masculinity and shared caregiving can reshape early learning environments and societal outcomes.



BOOK LAUNCH

This book explores how South Africa’s histories of colonialism and apartheid, together with cultural and social norms, shape how primary school teachers understand and respond to men’s absence and presence in the early years of schooling. It shows that explanations for why men do – or do not – teach young children are not neutral, but are embedded in complex, gendered processes that reflect the country’s distinctive socio-political landscape. In doing so, these interpretations often reproduce gendered inequalities that affect male and female teachers as well as the children they teach. Drawing on Southern theories, the book also offers a decolonial framework for researching men and masculinities in the early years, contributing new perspectives to debates about gender, care, and teaching in the Global South.

INSPIRING GREATNESS

PROGRAMME

08:00 | ARRIVAL AND REGISTRATION

08:50 | WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS
DEEVIA BHANA

09:00 | KEYNOTE ADDRESS I: MEN AND WORK VALUE IN THE EARLY EDUCATION ECONOMY
KEVIN MCGRATH

SESSION I: MALE FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS NEGOTIATING CULTURE AND MASCULINITIES

CHAIR: RABIA RIZVI

- **09:45 | EBUHLANTI: A SPACE FOR XHOSA MALE FOUNDATION PHASE TEACHERS' PEDAGOGICAL MENTORING**
OBAKENG KAGOLA
- **10:00 | "YOU DO NOT FEEL LIKE A MAN": NAVIGATING ZULU MASCULINITY AND BELONGING AS A MALE TEACHER IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE**
VUSI MSIZA AND SIMANGELE MKHIZE
- **10:15 | DISCUSSION AND Q&A**

10:25 | TEA BREAK

10:40 | ROUNDTABLE I: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A MAN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION
MODERATOR: KWANDA NDODA

DISCUSSANTS:

VUKA NKANYEZI ZULU
KWANELE CHAGWE
KHETHANI RAYNOLD SIBISI
NDUMISO PASCAL SITHOLE
SIBONELO NGCOBO
SANELE MSOMI
AYANDA SHEZI
SIFISO HLOPHE
VUYANI MZOLO
LWAZI MAJIKIJA
JUNIOR ZITHA
LUNGELO DLAMINI

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PROGRAMME

SESSION II: MULTIPLE MASCULINITIES IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AND CARE

CHAIR: TAWANDA MAKUSHA

- **11:40 | YOUNG CHILDREN TALK ABOUT MALE TEACHERS IN THE FOUNDATION PHASE**
SHAAISTA MOOSA AND DILOSHINI GOVENDER
- **11:55 | CARING MASCULINITIES AS A COUNTER-NARRATIVE TO GENDERED DIFFERENCE IN RURAL ECD SETTINGS**
MZOLI MNCANCA
- **12:10 | DISCUSSION AND Q&A**

12:20 | LUNCH

13:20 | KEYNOTE ADDRESS II: THE CHILD IS FATHER OF THE MAN: SCALING SOCIAL FATHERHOOD THROUGH MALE ECD PRACTITIONERS

KWANDA NDODA

SESSION III: FATHERS AS PARTNERS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT: TRANSFORMING MASCULINITIES THROUGH CARE AND ENGAGEMENT

CHAIR: VALERIE REDDY

- **14:05 | THE ROLE OF THE CHILD IN FATHER DEVELOPMENT: INSIGHTS FROM THE STATE OF THE WORLD'S FATHERS REPORT 2026**
WESSEL VAN DEN BERG
- **14:20 | FATHER INVOLVEMENT IN MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH IN THE FIRST 1000 DAYS: WHY THIS MATTERS**
TAWANDA MAKUSHA
- **14:35 | BEYOND THE SIDELINES, RAISING THE NEXT GENERATION: WHY MEN BELONG IN EARLY CHILDHOOD DEVELOPMENT (ECD)**
RUBY MOTAUNG
- **14:50 | DISCUSSION AND Q&A**

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PROGRAMME

15:00 | ROUNDTABLE II: WHERE TO NEXT FOR MEN IN EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION?
MODERATOR: VUSI MSIZA

DISCUSSANTS:

WESSEL VAN DEN BERG
KWANDA NDODA
KEVIN MCGRATH
OBAKENG KAGOLA
MZOLI MNCANCA
RUBY MOTAUNG
TAWANDA MAKUSHA
NTOMBIKHONA ZAMA
THOKOZISILE DUBE

16:00 | TEA BREAK

16:15 | BOOK LAUNCH: MALE TEACHERS AND MASCULINITY IN SOUTH AFRICA
SHAAISTA MOOSA AND DEEVIA BHANA

16:30 | CLOSING REMARKS
DEEVIA BHANA, KEVIN MCGRATH, KWANDA NDODA

16:45 | CONFERENCE CLOSE

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PARTICIPANTS

LUNGELO DLAMINI,
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
Pre-service Educator and Student

LWAZI MAJIKIJA,
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL, ENTUTHUKWENI PRIMARY SCHOOL
Pre-service Educator and Student

MZOLI MNCANCA,
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
Senior Lecturer, Department of Early Childhood Education

NDUMISO PASCAL SITHOLE,
AMAGENTS FOUNDATION, KHULAKAHLE CRÈCHE
Early Childhood Development Practitioner

NTOMBIKHONA ZAMA,
SILINDELE JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL
Head of Department, Foundation Phase

OBAKENG KAGOLA,
WALTER SISULU UNIVERSITY, NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY
Lecturer and Research Associate, Faculty of Education

RABIA RIZVI,
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
Postdoctoral Fellow, School of Education

RUBY MOTAUNG,
TRAINING AND RESOURCES IN EARLY EDUCATION
Director and Early Childhood Development Leader

SANELE MSOMI,
MVINI PRIMARY SCHOOL
Educator, Foundation Phase

SHAAISTA MOOSA,
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
Senior Lecturer, School of Education

SIBONELO NGCOBO,
AMAGENTS FOUNDATION
Early Childhood Development Practitioner

SIFISO HLOPHE,
SILINDELE JUNIOR PRIMARY SCHOOL
Educator, Foundation Phase

SIMANGELE MKHIZE,
INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
Lecturer, Faculty of Humanities

SIMANGELE MKHIZE,
INDEPENDENT INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
Lecturer, Faculty of Humanities

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PARTICIPANTS

TAWANDA MAKUSHA,
AFRICA HEALTH RESEARCH INSTITUTE
Senior Research Associate, Department of Clinical Research

THOKOZSILE DUBE,
ENTUTHUKWENI PRIMARY SCHOOL
Head of Department, Foundation Phase

VALERIE REDDY,
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
Research Associate and Educator

VUKA NKANYEZI ZULU,
AMAGENTS FOUNDATION
Early Childhood Development Practitioner

VUSI MSIZA,
UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA
Associate Professor, Department of Early Childhood Education

VUYANI MZOLO,
ASIPHEPHE PRIMARY SCHOOL
Educator, Foundation Phase

WESSEL VAN DEN BERG, EQUIMUNDO
SENIOR ADVOCACY OFFICER,
Center for Masculinities and Social Justice

AYANDA SHEZI,
MVINI PRIMARY SCHOOL
Educator, Foundation Phase

DEEVIA BHANA,
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
South African Research Chair, School of Education

DILOSHINI GOVENDER,
UNIVERSITY OF THE WITWATERSRAND
Lecturer, School of Education

JUNIOR ZITHA,
UNIVERSITY OF KWAZULU-NATAL
Pre-service Educator and Student

KHETHANI RAYNOLD SIBISI,
AMAGENTS FOUNDATION
Early Childhood Development Practitioner

KWANELE CHAGWE,
AMAGENTS FOUNDATION
Early Childhood Development Practitioner

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